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## **Women in American Politics**

LOIS L. DUKE

*Editor*

Prior to the 1960's, most of the research about movements for women's rights centered on women's suffrage in the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, since the 1960's, there has been an enormous number of studies on women and politics added to the political science discipline. One only has to superficially review the wealth of journal articles and books published analyzing the relationship between gender and politics in order to conclude the field of research in this area has substantially increased.

### **Research on Gender and Politics**

During this period of about the last quarter of a century, scholars who wished to research the influence of women's political behavior in the American political process were faced with numerous "growing pains." These included limited financial support for research on the topic, initial efforts to study a field which had established norms identified and defined from a male perspective and male-shaped understanding of the discipline, and the tendency for the political science world to view gender related research as "special interest," and "outside" the discipline. As a result of all the above, many studies on women and politics turned out to be descriptive narratives drawn from traditional concepts as opposed to empirically driven research studies.

The early pioneers of scholarly research on gender and politics, however, may currently reflect on a significant legacy of contributions. These include the present solid body of literature which analyzes gender socialization, women's political behavior (both at the individual and group level), and women's role (to include office-holding) in the political sector. The discipline of political science has further been influenced by the appearance of the Women's Caucus for Political Science (to include regional sub-groups) in 1968-69 as a recognized body within the American Political Science Association (APSA). Also, the Section on Women and Politics Research coordinates numerous panels on the topic of gender politics as a part of the national APSA meeting each year. Finally, for the first time, a female political scientist will serve as president of the APSA in 1989-90.

As we approach the 1990's however, it appears the early

scholars analyzing the issue of women in American politics have clearly passed along a challenge to the next generation of researchers on this topic. This challenge is to ascertain why it is that women are still represented in such small numbers in holding elective or appointive political office. Clearly there is a need to utilize the previously researched information so as to provide a new agenda in which findings on the role and performance of females in the public sector can be more conclusive. That is, why are more women not serving as elected and appointed officials in politics? The next research agenda for political science as a discipline should address this issue, thus leading the way in putting equal rights into practice as more and more women serve in the public sector, and further contributing to a political environment in which both women and men may blend their talents to choose an approach to politics based on mutual freedom.

It is hoped that this special issue of *The Journal of Political Science* may contribute in some small way to advance this understanding. This issue, derived from a call for papers on the general theme of women and politics, looks at female participation (or lack thereof) in the institutions of American government and in the political process which takes place in these institutional settings. The articles range from assessment of political attitudes and perceptions, surveying both men and women, in a party organization, a bureaucracy, and in the judiciary; to an examination of voting patterns, the maleness of the US presidential office, female representation in local government; to an analysis of public policy as it influences women in the area of Affirmative Action and reproduction.

The editor wishes to acknowledge the more than fifty women and men who submitted articles for this special issue. It is most gratifying to be involved in a designated project in which there is evidence of a great deal of enthusiasm and support. As editor, I only wish we might have had access to five special editions of *The Journal of Political Science*, so that we may have published more of the well-written and well-researched articles submitted in response to the call for papers. Special thanks goes to Martin W. Slann, editor of *The Journal of Political Science*, for his support and vote of confidence; and Deborah Whitfield and Susan Hawthorne for all their skilled help.

### **Profile of Contents**

The first article by Anne E. Kelley, William E. Hulbary, and Lewis Bowman (University of South Florida) reports the importance of gender as a variable in accounting for political



attitudes among party activists in Florida. Utilizing data from a 1984 survey, the authors develop a political ideology scale which they then relate to gender, party, and social characteristics. They find that partisanship is the major discriminating variable but that, regardless of party affiliation, gender often is related to ideological differences among the party activists. Several social characteristics offer explanations about which of the women and men, representing Florida's precinct committeepersons, are more liberal or conservative than would be expected on the basis of partisanship alone.

The second article by Janet K. Boles (Marquette University) incorporates almost a decade of new research on the topic of perceptions of female and male elected officials. She found positive images of women in elected office, based in part upon a view of women as morally superior, that is more honest and caring than men in politics. Although offering women initial advantages in gaining office, Boles argues that acceptance of women's moral superiority could prove to be a barrier to effectiveness once in office. For example, women could be relegated to specializations in health, education, and welfare. She also suggests that images of women and men in politics are less related to sex role stereotypes and feminism than assumed. Thus, both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans logically could hold positive images of women in politics.

The third article by Susan A. MacManus (University of South Florida) and Charles S. Bullock, III (University of Georgia) examines the influences of governmental structural variables (single member district election systems, council size, incumbency return rate, length of term, staggered terms, and majority vote requirements) in assessing female representation on Southern city councils. The research data are drawn in the spring of 1986 from the 211 cities with 1980 populations over 25,000 in eleven southern states. While the researchers occasionally observed variations across the structural variables considered, the overwhelming thrust of their findings is that structural features are not associated with whether women serve as council members.

The fourth article by Emily Stoper (California State University, Hayward) investigates the question of why some women vote so much like men in presidential elections despite having significantly different attitudes from men over the long term. Her data are drawn from an examination of Gallup polls and surveys from The Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, covering the period 1936-1984. She argues that in at least three issue areas, all of which emerged during the

suffrage battle, women have in fact voted differently in referenda and differently from men in polls and surveys. However, until the 1980's, these differences have only rarely been translated (to a statistically significant degree) into different candidate votes or partisan affiliations due to certain peculiarities of the American political system. The three areas are: (1) political corruption, (2) war and peace, and (3) sumptuary legislation ("crimes without a victim").

The fifth article by Marcia Lynn Whicker and Todd W. Areson (Virginia Commonwealth University) explores why the US Presidency has been a bastion of maleness. They identify four factors which account for the unlevel presidential "playing field" that women candidates face: the presidential system of direct, popular election; the paucity of women gaining experience in the three presidential "launching roles"; the difficulty women face in securing campaign funding for national and subnational races; and longstanding public images of a conflict for women—and not for men—between familial and political roles.

The sixth article by F. Elaine Martin (Eastern Michigan University) represents basically a new area of research in which the author attempts to establish some dimensions to the different, gender-based, perspectives men and women judges might bring to the bench. Three areas of potential attitudinal differences between women and men are examined: perceptions of the role of women judges; perceptions of gender bias in the courts; and decisions on five hypothetical cases raising women's rights issues. A major underlying question in the study is whether gender or feminist ideology is a more important influence on judicial attitudes. Controlling for feminism, statistically significant variations between genders were found on almost every attitudinal variable tested. The influence of gender and feminism was not as apparent in respondents' votes on the hypothetical cases.

The seventh article by Jeanie R. Stanley (The University of Texas at Tyler) reports the findings from a study of high level Texas public administrators conducted in 1986 to identify barriers to the advancement of women. The author found that gender segregation and discrimination often noted at the lower levels persist at the top as a result of both institutional and interpersonal practices. Although the general background qualifications

and career development of male and female administrators were similar, women are far more likely than men to have observed or experienced a wide variety of discriminatory behavior. However, most Texas administrators, both male and female, were found to



be supportive of reforms to address certain domestic and institutional constraints which impede female advancement.

The eighth article by Diane D. Blair (University of Arkansas) deals with the politics of reproduction. The article compares and analyzes both Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1986) and Ben Wattenberg's The Birth Dearth (1987). Blair argues that Atwood, writing from a feminist perspective, posits a dystopia in which women have been reduced to the function of being breeders. On the other hand, Wattenberg, writing from what Blair describes as a "nationalistic perspective," is said to deplore the current American "birth dearth," attributes it primarily to "working women," and proposes a variety of pro-nationalist remedies. Blair maintains that among the significant implications of these two books, especially when read in tandem, are: that pro-natalism, justified by America's relatively low fertility rate, has climbed high on many conservative agendas; that this movement seriously jeopardizes many of the gains achieved by feminists in recent years; and that the contemporary pro-natalist drive has long and powerful historical precedents.

The ninth article by Roberta Ann Johnson (University of San Francisco) offers a generic definition of Affirmative Action and then does three things. First, it traces the development of the federal Affirmative Action policy from the issuing of Executive Orders by Presidents Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson to its full implementation in the Department of Labor. Secondly, the paper summarizes and evaluates all the Affirmative Action cases decided by the Supreme Court, starting with the Bakke decision. Finally, using Census and Department of Labor statistics and secondary sources, the study considers the ways Affirmative Action increases opportunities for women. Throughout the paper, the author recognizes Affirmative Action for its redistributive thrust.

The last article by Janet Clark and Cal Clark (University of Wyoming) examines the nature of the gender gap in Wyoming and uses it to explain the fairly strong relationship that was found between gender and attitudes about President Reagan's proposal to deploy the MX missile in a densepack system in the southeast corner of the state. The authors found that the gender gap in Wyoming appears to be a mix of what they called the "old" and "new" gaps. The difference in male and female participation levels, which formed the core of the "old" gap, is absent in Wyoming. However, gender differences in political attitudes among Wyomingites still follow the "old" pattern of being limited to comparatively few issues concerning international peace and personal/family morality and security.